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ABSTRACT

A review of the literature on personality as compiled by Adelson, Dahlstrom, Fiske and Pearson suggests that personality theory is a "swamp" through which one must tread carefully. The author recommends these cautions: (1) view carefully personality constructs and polarities from one experimenter which are reported with little regard for their predictive power or construct network; (2) remember the meaning of construct, concurrent, and predictive validity; (3) fixed-stage theories of human development may not be as useful in the management of human behavior as trait theories based on extensive reports of a few longitudinal studies in the research literature; and (4) genetic, developmental, and environmental correlates of "personality" are still largely unknowns in the broad reaches of human development, and thus the extent of change to be effected in an individual by counseling must be carefully considered. Finally, the author supports the understanding of: (1) ability and achievement measures as relatively unchanging; (2) situational factors that modulate individual behavior in its totality, i.e., evidence on performance of individuals from minority groups; (3) the few longitudinal studies about a few crucial personality traits; and (4) the relative effectiveness of intervention procedures. (MA)

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"Personality Theory as Related to Counseling Psychology"

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When Dr. Kirk asked me to participate in this symposium honoring Ed Williamson, I responded like an old fire-horse hearing the warning gong. After all, I've made several appearances honoring Ed's retirement and contributions in recent years. Considering the difficulties of managing universities today, I can envy his retirement and contemplate the possibility that he may walk across my grave on the way to his own. But my acceptance is a perfect example of personality overriding intellect; I repressed the fact that I have done no counseling for almost twenty-five years, and, while my spirit might be willing, my mind is somewhat weak, as is my knowledge of the literature.

Fortunately or unfortunately during recent months, I have suffered from the recurring delusion of the aging administrator that he must return to teaching and research. My colleagues and I are undertaking a revision of our earlier (1955) volume on vocational interest measurement; I am surrounded therefore--up to my hips--by a welter of reprints, abstracts, books, Annual Review articles, and rather unintelligible personal notes related to this project. With some slight additional effort, it seemed that a pseudopod could reach out to encompass the theme of this symposium. Minnesota may introduce a plan of early faculty retirement as a means of coping with legislative retrenchment; this will be one medicine that will cure the aging administrator's delusion, but it will not come in time to keep me from inflicting this paper on you.

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It seemed habitual in the scholarly tradition to look at our early writings about counseling. What had we then said about personality? In our first book, Dr. Williamson and I (1937) categorized personality problems that counselors might face. The rubrics may today seem a little naive: personality traits precluding life or job adjustment; inappropriate socialization; sex conflicts; sibling conflicts; split-family situations; overdependence; overt family conflict; persistent worries about health. If only these problems would go away or be solved, we could get on with the proper counseling tasks. Our general position then about testing was reflected in the following quotation: "While (the) evidence is impressive from the standpoint of reliability, possibly validity, and other criteria applied as tests of scientific accuracy, yet we venture the opinion that so little counseling and clinical use has been made of tests of attitudes, adjustments, emotions, conduct, and ethical discrimination as to warrant the recommendation that such tests should be used cautiously and critically, if at all, as counseling tools." (page 155)

In a later memorial volume honoring Professor Donald G. Paterson, and edited by Dr. Williamson (1949). I find myself saying that "personality and interest tests, broadly conceived, are some of the weapons with which human motivation and the dynamics of personality must be attacked and by which, possibly, they can be reduced to the level of prediction and control in human behavior" (page 54). Such instruments, I suggested, might have a part to play in: the analysis of occupational problems; the analysis of societal problems; the evaluation of educational outcomes; clinical diagnosis and therapy; and theoretical studies of human behavior.

Finally, in our 1955 monograph (Darley and Hagenah) dealing with theories of

vocational interest measurement, we argued generally that measured vocational interests were special examples or special cases of personality measurement, reflecting developmental aspects of human behavior and shaping or dictating individuals' choices of the arenas in which they would apply their abilities and skills to find satisfaction in the world of work. One of my students, John Holland (1966), has generated an interesting extension of this assumption.

Parenthetically, this exercise of reading one's own earlier writings has ambiguous outcomes; on the one hand, a certain pleasure supervenes at the crispness of the prose; on the other hand, a certain sheepishness remains about the naivete and superficiality of one's probing of the issues.

Seeking greater wisdom, therefore, I have turned to the last ten volumes of the Annual Review of Psychology, reading those chapters on personality and personality measurement or assessment, as they appear cyclically. Rather than giving an extended overview of all of these, three excellent chapters--the 1969 chapter on personality by Joseph Adelson (1969), the 1970 chapter on personality by W. Grant Dahlstrom (1970), and the 1970 chapter on theory and techniques of personality measurement, by Donald Fiske and Pamela Pearson (1970)--will provide sufficient samplings to illustrate the blazing confusion, diffusion, and reification of this area of psychology. Speaking of the abundance, diffuseness, and diversity of this field, Adelson (1969) comments first that "it is hard to establish boundaries between personality and other psychologies." Once conceived as a matter of enduring dispositions, personality is often now conceived as response potentials activated by situations; thus the overlap between social psychology and personality psychology. It is also, he says, "a loose collection of topics--an achievement literature, an anxiety literature, and so on--each of which more or less goes its own way."

The literature is centrifugal and excessively empirical, lacking synthesising concepts and abandoning theoretical ambitions. "Thus, despite the cant that we continue to preach to our undergraduates to the effect that theory and research are bonded, each inspiring the other.....the plain fact is that there are only occasional and erratic articulations between the two." Further: "Our styles of investigation, (then), may stifle the discovery of the new and unexpected and in doing so inhibit the freshening of theory."

Adelson goes on to define the crisis in methodology as involving our samples of subjects, our problems of ethics in research, the recent evidence on unexpected experimenter effects, and the rigid setting of the experiment itself in terms of its classic overcontrol of variables. Then follows his choice of topics for review: studies of morality and delinquency; studies of effectiveness, in terms of White's earlier writings on competence; the psychoanalytic treatments of ego autonomy, ego strength, self-esteem; the various California studies of adult effectiveness of children studied in their earlier years; studies of need achievement; of anxiety; of stress; of defensive behavior, with particular reference to the Byrne R-S Scale; and studies of agression.

He concludes by calling attention to the greater role of cognitive variables which "have proved to be extraordinarily useful in the study of personality", such as Witkin's field-dependence-independence treatment of cognitive style, and to the "renewed interest in exploring empirically the psychoanalytic character typology."

While he does not view the field with quite as much alarm and despondency as Adelson, Dahlstrom is equally critical and incisive in his 1970 annual review.

He says: "the central problem for personologists at this stage in the development of our field seems to be lack of any consensus in conceptualization." For example, we may side-step the definitional problem by treating personality as an area of investigation rather than an entity; we may fall into the trap of conceiving personality primarily as social stimulus value; some of us may talk of personality as the individual's "total response repertoire" ignoring the literature on dimensionalized traits and their empirically established correlational networks, in the sense of construct validity, at least.

While Dahlstrom obviously finds the differential trait approach to personality the most satisfying, he is not unaware of its problems. He cites literature contrasting three different personality formulations; and the problems each encounters in dealing with personality development. These are the differential trait approach; the approach to personality development through fixed stages (Freud or Piaget); and the idiographic approach. In the differential trait approach, or structural approach, we cannot be certain that a trait identified at a given age is equivalent to a trait identified at an earlier or later period in the individual, for rather straightforward psychometric reasons. This is the case largely in the absence of good longitudinal studies. He says: "Most personality research is devoted to the elucidation of rather separate, often individually developed and scaled, measures of personality dimensions (not) typically tied into coherent formulations or particular theories." As examples, not necessarily horrible, he mentions Byrne's repression-sensitization scale, Rotter's locus of control of reinforcements scale, Witkin's field-independence indices, Taylor's manifest anxiety scale, measures of level of aspiration, dogmatism, and need for approval; he could have mentioned the authoritarianism scales, the need achievement indices, and many other examples of reification.

Dahlstrom then deals specifically with the idea of personality as a dynamic system. He discusses characteristics of such systems in individuals; the role of motivations as dynamics in the systems; the utility of psychology's few great longitudinal studies as tests of concepts; and the more sophisticated statistical procedures now available for analysing systems. He comments on the limitations of step-function testing, i.e. the relation between changes in variable X and resultant changes in variable Y. In these studies he suggests that subject adaptation, experimenter effects, subject selection and expectation, differential subject response to ostensibly identical stimuli (as in the case of stress research), arousal, anxiety, aggression, and impulsivity variables have not been clearly controlled or accounted for.

He presents illustrations of research in which fully-functioning personality systems in individuals are the objects of study, citing Schachter's studies of obesity, Feathers' study of achievement motivation, McKeachie's study of need achievement and college grades, and Wallach and Wing's study of creativity in college students, as well as other research on creativity emerging from the program of IPAR at Berkeley by McKinnon and his colleagues. Finally he treats as examples of full-system research the reports of Astin for the American Council on Education, the studies of Holland in the American College Testing program, the studies of David Campbell at Minnesota's CIMR, and similar reports well-known to many of you in counseling psychology.

The chapter by Fiske and Pearson (1970) is more concerned with methodological than with substantive problems in personality measurement; but it is still relevant to this symposium, if only because counselors may be insufficiently aware of these methodological issues.

They say: "Most concepts in the personality field are so broad and heterogeneous in their referents that when one concept is used to describe different persons, it is very doubtful that the identical attribute is applied to each. The task facing personality today is the identification and delineation of attributes which can be uniformly applied to persons..... (and) the work of developing operations for measuring each of these attributes." Further: "The empiricist who prefers to start with such relatively objective observations as test responses finds that his analytically derived variables" are as confounded as are the measurement results of the conceptualist who is uncritical of his own measurement operations. "So the student of personality measurement finds himself with no solid rock on which to build: personality constructs are too vague to serve as blueprints for test construction, while observed responses vary with the stimuli, the setting, and the subject's perceptions of them, i.e., with the method or the class of observations which are utilized."

The authors then comment on three strategies for personality measurement: global-rational; separated-rational; and empiric. The first two can be said to rely on construct validity ideas, on nomological nets; the third usually involves predictive validity. Within this framework, they review recent research literature on several personality measures, both objective and projective. A comment about empirically derived measures can, I think, apply with equal force to measures derived under other strategies: "When defensiveness is equated with anxiety and anxiety is equated with neuroticism, and all may be equated with social desirability, conceptual distinctions no longer exist in any meaningful sense."

Fiske and Pearson (1970) go on to discuss two major measurement dilemnas in personality: low single-trait multi-method intercorrelations; the differential

impact of moderator variables. As alternative strategies, and with some reservations, they suggest: global assessment procedures; trait-state analyses, as illustrated by Spielberger's work on anxiety; a revisit to the clinical vs. statistical prediction problem; more concentration on construct or nomological net studies; greater attention to situational determinants of response.

They then treat in considerable technical detail, some of our old ghosts: situation effects; testing conditions; observer effects; examiner effects; idiosyncratic subject reactions; ethical considerations; response sets and styles; item format and control. They conclude by saying: "We seem to be approaching the limits of what can be achieved by measuring operations derived from current assumptions and orientations. The time is ripe for giant steps, for bold reorganizations of our thinking, for creative innovations in the construing of personality and its measurement."

So much for my bloodbath in the recent literature. I have the strange <u>deja vu</u> feeling that I've been here before--that things haven't really changed much in the quarter-century since I stopped being a counselor. I remember cautioning neophytes about these issues, although my vocabulary was less exotic.

What then shall we say about personality theory to a young counseling psychologist? A vulgar adjuration comes to mind: "Watch it, buster; you're gonna fall on your face!" This lacks, however, a certain dignity and scholarliness. A more oracular and avuncular set of admonitions might run as follows.

Personality is a morass, a slough, a swamp through which you must pick your way most carefully. Be on your guard about the plethora of theories, all of which

are moderately heuristic, but none of which will lead you to the Holy Grail. View most carefully personality constructs or trait names and polarities reified from the speculations of a single experimenter and reported in a spate of research reports with little regard for their extensivity, predictive power, or construct network. In this connection, we once postulated a polarity in interest measurement labelled extrinsic vs. intrinsic interests (Darley and Hagenah). It was not until a recent PhD oral that it dawned on me that I had no idea whatsoever of the behavioral referents or measurement operations signifying the existence of this beautiful polarity. Remember that any and all factorial studies of personality are dependent on their original input measures and are not necessarily ultimate trait realities merely because of their methodological sophistication.

Keep always at hand your notes about the meaning of construct, concurrent, and predictive validity; these notes will derive from your annual rereading of the classic article by Cronbach and Meehl (1955). Whisper to yourself the magic phrase "moderator variable" from time to time. This will alert you to the possibility that a general zero-order prediction will not apply to an individual if he belongs to a definable sub-set within the original validating sample.

Cleave to the possibility that holistic, global, fixed-stage theories of human development or idiographic and disjunctive theories of human personality may not be as useful or as promising in the management of human behavior as trait theories based on extensive reports of a few longitudinal studies in the research literature. In this connection, I have come to realize that many of our earlier arguments with Dr. Rogers, about non-directive counseling methods, were

au fond arguments regarding alternative beliefs about human development but not about counseling processes.

Remember that the genetic, developmental, and environmental determinants or correlates of "personality", however we define it, are still largely terra incognita in the broad reaches of human development and human functioning. It follows, therefore, that the extent of change or modifiability to be effected in an individual by counseling or any other form of intervention must be carefully considered by the counselor. In this regard, and for a delightful intellectual experience, I would commend the relevant chapters in Brown (1965) and Byrne (1966) about those hardy perennials, the achievement motive, the authoritarian personality, manifest anxiety, and the self-concept.

Having said that personality theory is a morass or a swamp does not, however, make it possible for counseling psychology to avoid its passage or to stop on the near side. The counseling psychologist has always dealt in some way with an implicit concept of personality. This concept may involve a direct attack on pathological conditions blocking effective functioning in the individual. It may involve a private network of seductive assumptions about man's infinite perfectability and potential. It may lead the counselor to a search for congruence in test data as an extension of the occupational ability profile idea to encompass personality data hopefully predictive of the individual's later success or satisfaction in work. It may direct his attention to the choice of environments in which an individual might function with some adequacy, assuming minimal likelihood of behavioral change.

Goldman, in his excellent book on tests in the counseling process (1971), specifies

these ideas slightly differently when he discusses four categories of interpretation of case data: descriptive; genetic (and developmental); predictive; and evaluative. He also describes the statistical and clinical bridges that counselors must use in their case work, and deals in clear detail with nine major problems in test interpretation. I assume that his text is compulsory reading in counselor training today.

Let me change the figure of speech in concluding these comments. The curtain goes up on the rather free-form drama we call counseling. It would be nice if the counselor had a valid theory of personality to guide his performance; unfortunately, this is not the case.

Faced then with some wealth of evidence about the ability, achievement, interests, personality, and background of his client, he opens the performance with a quiet aside: "I think I know what he can do; how can I learn what he will do and how can I help him to find his way?"

The play goes on from there. If the counselor is to carry out his role with dignity, with skill and compassion, what must he have rehearsed before appearing on stage? What must he have learned?

First, ability and achievement measures, in the short run at least, touch on docile and tractable variables; they will not change drastically or unpredictably as the play goes forward. Second, there will be situational factors and environments that modulate individual behavior in its totality. Consider most dramatically some of the accumulating evidence on performance of individuals from minority groups, as discussed for example by Katz (1964).

Third, what do the few major longitudinal or factorial studies tell us about the development, stability, and utility of a handful of crucial traits, however named, in the broad sphere of personality?

Fourth, if he must intervene, does the counselor know the relative effectiveness of intervention procedures? There is a literature in this area and behavior modification is a powerful procedure in skilled hands.

Fifth, if he holds essentially a doctrinaire position--a fixed set of beliefs--regarding personality, the free-form play will become a monologue rather than a dramatic interaction and evolving process.

In briefest summary, counseling psychology will find no lifeboat nor safe harbor in personality theory, but the counseling psychologist who has failed to rehearse and to learn to swim in these muddied rip tides cannot fulfill his real-life role.

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